

The Pumpkin Post and Banana Beat: Innovative Newsletters for FNP Families

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The ***Pumpkin Post*** (or ***El Recaito*** as the Spanish version) is a fun newsletter developed by the University of Massachusetts Extension Family Nutrition Program for Food Stamp eligible parents or caregivers of preschool- to third-grade children. The newsletter was developed in response to requests that we extend our early childhood nutrition education programs to the families of the children. Each issue contains a special insert called The ***Banana Beat*** (or ***Sabrosito*** as the Spanish version) designed for the children themselves. The ***Pumpkin Post*** includes recipes and regular columns on child feeding challenges, seasonal foods, menu ideas, "Ask Dr. Greenbean," and "Marvelous Morsels." The ***Banana Beat*** features a fold-open activity poster for the children, a special children's recipe, a health-promoting fairy tale, and a fun physical activity. The pair comes in a series of six issues with the following themes: 1) Setting and Reaching Your Goals, 2) Fun Breakfasts – Break the Rules, 3) Moving for Fun and Fitness, 4) Color and Crunch and Great Things to Munch (fruits and vegetables), 5) Pack Power in Your Lunchbox, and 6) Feasts, Festivals and Family. Overall, the newsletters are designed not only to provide information but also to promote parent-child activities for better nutrition and physical activity.

A total of 69 parents who had received one or more issues of the newsletters completed an evaluation survey. Nearly half (47%) of these parents said they read the entire newsletters, another 15% said they read most of them, and 35% said they read a few of the articles. About half (49%) said they kept the newsletters after reading them, and 22% gave them to others when they were done. As a useful source of nutrition information, the ***Pumpkin Post*** was rated second only to doctors/nurses/health professionals, surpassing the categories of books, teachers/child care providers, and relatives/friends. Sections rated most highly were "Ask Dr. Greenbean" and seasonal buys. In addition, more than 50% of respondents said they had tried the menus and recipes.

Parents also reported that the ***Pumpkin Post*** had a positive effect on talking to their children about healthy food choices (76%), getting their children to eat healthier foods (68%), and making healthier meal and snack choices (85%). These impacts and ratings of usefulness were greater for those who received more issues. At \$.25 per issue pair, The ***Pumpkin Post*** and ***Banana Beat*** appear to be a cost-effective way of extending and reinforcing our preschool nutrition education activities.